

Statement by Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Washington, DC) – *The following is a statement by Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL), Chairman of the Task Force on Immigration of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and a key national leader supporting of the DREAM Act and immigration reform.*

The echo of this vote will be loud and long. We are at the tipping point that will define the political alignment of the Republican and Democratic parties with Latino voters for a generation.

The Republican Party could have changed their tune on the immigration issue but passed up the opportunity and did so on national television in practically every Latino home in America. If they are betting that Latino and immigrant voters will forget what happened today in Washington, they will be sadly mistaken. The voting power of Latinos, immigrants, and of a whole generation of young Americans who were fighting for their undocumented classmates will be a force in U.S. politics for as far as the eye can see into the future -- with or without the DREAM Act.

The Senate vote was not about politics or procedure, but was a national referendum on the basic civil rights of immigrants, most of whom are Latinos. Can undocumented immigrants ever be part of society under any circumstances? A minority of the U.S. Senate said we will not even discuss the matter and therefore the barriers to legality and full participation in our society remain in place. This was a setback to the core values of liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the United States. These Senators hid behind lame procedural excuses to thwart the hopes and aspirations of the best and brightest of our families and communities, which is both a tragedy and a call to action.

Today we mourn, but tomorrow we shift back into gear to fight for justice and inclusion in America. We must not only fight to protect our DREAM Act brothers and sisters, but also their mothers and fathers from the mass deportation policies that are staining and tearing our moral fabric. The deportation of 400,000 people a year is a moral challenge to young people, immigrants, Latinos and every American of conscience. We can change the very course of history and steer America away from the ludicrous policy of trying to drive out or deport 12 million undocumented immigrants. This generation of immigrants, like every generation of immigrants before them, will make their mark on American history and will improve this country and recommit her to her core values in the process.

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